

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**Minutes of March 10, 2015**

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Selectmen Lynn Doney, Matthew Gadbois, Kenneth W. Goslant, K. David Maxwell, and John Quinn III. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Skip Davidson (Norwich University), Chris Bradley, Josh Sanders, and Kathleen Lott (*Northfield News*).

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. **ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Election of Chair.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to appoint John Quinn III as Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Quinn abstaining.**
- b. **Election of Vice-Chair.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to appoint K. David Maxwell as Vice-Chair. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Maxwell abstaining.**
- c. **Select Board Committee Assignments.** Chair Quinn recommended that the allocation of the committee assignments be tabled until the next regular meeting (03/24/15) so that Manager Schulz can advise which committees should be retained. This also will provide the Selectmen with additional time to decide which committees they would like to serve upon. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to table this matter. Manager Schulz noted that the appointed Utility Commissioner(s) will need to be appointed soon in order to review the utility budgets proposed for the next fiscal year. Since the relevant information had been available in the Board packets, Selectman Goslant did not see any reason to delay the committee assignments for another two weeks. **Motion passed 3-2-0, with Selectmen Doney and Goslant voting in the negative.**
- d. **Regular Meeting Schedule (Dates, Time, and Location).** The Select Board's regular meetings will continue to be held on the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) and fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library.
- e. **Designation of Official Newspapers.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to designate the *Northfield News*, the *Washington World*, and the *Times Argus* as the official newspapers for the Town of Northfield. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- IV. **SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Chair Quinn asked that the discussion of the proposed ROTC 5K Fun Run/Walk be moved forward in the meeting under "Public Participation." Manager Schulz also confirmed that an executive session would be held to discuss a contract matter.

V. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. **Skip Davidson, Norwich University: First Annual Norwich University ROTC 5K Fun Run/Walk.** Mr. Davidson is the Director of Recruitment for Norwich University. In recognition of the ninety-ninth (99<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of the founding of the ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) and the JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps), a 5K Fun Run/Walk will be held at numerous locations around the world on Saturday, April 25, 2015, starting at 12:00 EDT. This will be an attempt to break the current record in the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest simultaneous participation in a walk/run. Since its founder Captain Alden Partridge first promoted the idea of a "citizen soldier," Norwich University is widely considered to be the "Birthplace of the ROTC." The local walk/run will begin and end on the Norwich University campus (Shapiro Field House) but Mr. Davidson would like the Select Board's permission for the race route to include Central Street, Wall Street, and Water Street. There will be campus staff on hand to assist with traffic control, etc. Norwich University also will work with the Northfield Police Department, Ambulance Service, etc. prior to the race and will advertise the event far in advance.

This will be a free event open to Norwich University students, alumni, and staff; Northfield residents; etc. A CBS Sports news crew will be on hand to film the walk/run as part of a two (2) hour documentary. Chair Quinn has no objections provided that the local emergency services are kept in the loop. Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to allow the use of Town roads for the walk/run provided that there are no objections from Northfield Emergency Services. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Mr. Davidson thanked the Select Board and noted that should the initial walk/run prove successful, there is every likelihood that this will become an annual event. If this is the case, there will be a strong effort to have over one million people (1,000,000) take part in the ROTC's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary walk/run in 2016.

- b. **Chris Bradley: Northfield Police Department Staffing.** Mr. Bradley is a former Town Selectman and felt that prior to 2008, the Northfield Police department (NPD) was properly staffed with seven (7) full-time officers (including the Police Chief). A hiring freeze went into effect then and a subsequent vacancy was not filled. When he was on the Select Board in 2012, Mr. Bradley stated that the Board fully examined and determined that the proper NPD staffing was seven full-time officers and pledged to fund all the positions. In addition, when the current NPD union contract was approved in May 2014, it specifically stated that NPD staffing would be seven full-time officers, including the Police Chief and a new Detective position. The latter position was filled by an experienced NPD officer with flexible work hours and was intended to free up the other officers for patrol duty. However, when the NPD budget for FY 2015/2016 was drafted, the Detective position was eliminated. Mr. Bradley wanted to know why this happened. Chair Quinn said that when the Town Selectmen and Village Trustees jointly hired a new manager for the merged community, that person was tasked with determining the proper level of staffing for NPD with the intention of creating a level fund budget. It was Manager Schulz's recommendation to eliminate this position.

Mr. Bradley noted that the FY 2015/2016 NPD budget is not level funded but in fact is cut by four percent (4%). Given that the union contract was signed less than a year ago, Northfield's population has not declined, and the number of NPD service calls has increased, Mr. Bradley remains curious why this budget cut occurred. He added that a survey of comparable Vermont communities undertaken by the Select Board concluded that Northfield should have seven (7) full-time officers. Mr. Bradley made the motion at the open session of last week's Town Meeting to increase the amount of the proposed General Fund Budget in order to retain the Detective position but was unsuccessful. He now is asking the Select Board to hold a Special Town Meeting so that Northfield voters can have another opportunity to rectify this situation. Should the Select Board refuse to do so, Mr. Bradley retains the option of circulating a petition to hold a Special Town Meeting in order to reconsider approval of the FY 2015/2016 budget. This would require obtaining the signatures of ten percent (10%) of Northfield's registered voters. Mr. Bradley believes that there will be a number of problems generated by the reduction in NPD staffing, such as increased overtime expenses, higher costs for additional part-time officers, etc. He felt that there were other areas in the municipal budget less vital than public safety that could be reduced if the Select Board really intended to level fund. When Selectman Goslant asked where these cuts might be found, Mr. Bradley suggested some savings might be found in the Brown Public Library and the Municipal Pool budgets.

Chair Quinn stated that the national and regional economy has been tough for some time, especially for those on fixed incomes. The Select Board made a conscious decision to level fund the municipal budget in order to keep the level of property taxes low. Mr. Bradley did not feel that the economic situation has changed that much since the union contract was signed last year. Chair Quinn noted that the NPD was not singled out as several departments saw budget cuts, which meant some positions were eliminated. He did not feel that the NPD union contract has been violated. Selectman Gadbois agreed, stating that the contract allowed for up to seven full-time officers. Mr. Bradley believes that the original intent behind this clause in the contract was fairly clear. He then thanked the Select Board for allowing him to express his concerns tonight.

## VI. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. **Finance Director Laurie Baroffio.** Ms. Baroffio noted that the financial statements for the current fiscal year through February 2015 had been in the Board packets. She stated that the General Fund balance looks positive at this time with revenues higher than expected. For example, there has been a sixteen percent (16%) increase in the number of billable runs for the Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS). This was largely due to NAS being able to respond to area calls without having to rely on outside agencies for assistance. In addition, the Accounting Department has saved money by hiring a part-time employee without benefits to assist with billing matters rather than sharing a full-time employee with the Utility Department. In addition, the elimination of the Highway Superintendent position has helped to keep the Highway Department on budget.

Ms. Baroffio felt that the greatest concern at the moment is with the NPD budget. The 2014/2015 NPD budget was formulated before the current union contract was signed. Manager Schulz said there was an effort in drafting the agreement to increase officer salaries in order to make the NPD more competitive with other Vermont police departments and thus promote officer retention. Ms. Baroffio added that some of the new contract stipulations will not take effect until the next fiscal year. However, part-time officer expenses already are \$1100 over budget. Selectman Goslant thought that since part-time officers don't receive benefits, hiring them should result in some cost savings. Ms. Baroffio stated should work in theory but in practice any real savings would require laying off some full-time officers and replacing them with part-timers. She added that relying on part-time officers, however, probably would lead to staffing instability. Manager Schulz will be working with Police Chief James Dziobek in order to stay within the union contract while conforming to the approved budget.

Ms. Baroffio stated that the utility department budgets all are in good shape. Due to relatively low energy costs, the Electric Department is about \$149,000 under budget for power purchases. In addition, the Water Department will not need to make a \$50,000 payment on the South Phase of the Water Project until the next fiscal year, which will help with current expenses. The relevant department heads now are being consulted regarding the proposed utility budgets for the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz will provide draft budgets to the Utility Commissions for discussion in April and then presented to the full Select Board the following month. Selectman Maxwell asked why power purchases are so far under budget. Ms. Baroffio felt that this should be addressed during the upcoming utility budget discussions. Chair Quinn thanked Ms. Baroffio for her presentation.

## VII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **February 24, 2015 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Selectman Goslant abstaining.**

## VIII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #18-15.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve Warrant #18-15 in the amount of \$1,428,543.34. Selectman Gadbois saw some legal expenses for a matter he thought had been resolved. He asked if this would be the last payment. Manager Schulz said that he has been working with the attorney to limit expenses but, unfortunately, much of the legal work generated has been in response to the actions of the other party involved. Selectman Goslant asked why the Town was paying to remove road sand from storm drains. Ms. Baroffio stated that this was an inter-company expense that used to be charged to the Village Highway Department. Chair Quinn would like the allocation amount reviewed for accuracy. Manager Schulz will look into this. Selectman Goslant asked if much road sand was put on streets with storm drains. Selectman Maxwell said this did happen. For example, a lot of road sand is deposited on Central Street during winter months. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through March 1, 2015.** Motion by Selectman Gadbois, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to approve the bi-weekly payroll in the amount of \$83,087.93. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**IX. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION**

**a. Liquor License Renewal Applications**

- 1. American Legion Club.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- 2. Convenience Plus.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- 3. Rustic Restaurant.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

**X. SELECT BOARD**

- a. Authorization to Sell Town Property (1048 West Hill Road).** Manager Schulz said this property went up for delinquent tax sale a year ago and the Town purchased it then. Since back taxes still have not been paid, he would like the Board's authorization to sell the property by auction. Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to authorize Manager Schulz to begin the process for selling the property. Selectman Goslant thought the Town has done all it can do in this matter. Chair Quinn added that numerous tax agreements were made in the past but all have been broken. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. Grand Juror Vacancy.** Since no one ran for the office on Town Meeting Day, the vacancy will be advertised. The successful applicant will hold the position until March 2016.

**XI. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. FEMA Flood-Damaged Property Buyout Update.** Selectman Goslant asked if the Town now was purchasing the flood-damaged structure on 440 Water Street. Manager Schulz confirmed that the owner has changed her mind and now will participate in the program. We are now going through the necessary purchase steps, i.e., Asbestos inspection, etc.
- b. Lien Authority for Unpaid Electric Bills.** Selectman Gadbois had some questions regarding the letter that recently went out to rental property owners. Manager Schulz said that the Northfield Electric Department (NED) will continue to make every effort to collect overdue payments from current and former tenants. However, should the debt prove uncollectable, NED now has the ability to place a lien on the property.
- c. Select Board Meeting Policy, etc.** Chair Quinn would like it established as policy that when members of the public address the Select Board all questions should be directed to the Chair. This will prevent crosstalk, etc. during the meeting. In addition, he would like all requests for public information from reporters, etc. to go through the Select Board Chair and/or the Town Manager. There was no objection to these requests.

**XII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT.** Manager Schulz had nothing to add to his written report.

**XIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED).** There was none.

**XIV. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Gadbois, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313(a)(1), in order to discuss a contract matter with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:35 p.m.

Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to come out of executive session.  
**Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:05 p.m. No action was taken.

**XV. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Selectman Goslant, seconded by Selectman Maxwell, to adjourn.  
**Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of March 24, 2015.